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Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee  
Connecticut General Assembly  
State Capitol  
Hartford, Connecticut 06106-1562

February 26, 2023

Dear Senator Fonfara, Representative Horn, and the distinguished members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee:

My name is Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox and I live in Trumbull.

I'm a member of CSU-AAUP, the faculty union that represents nearly 3000 faculty members at our four universities. Over the course of the last several years, our universities, and especially WCSU where I am employed, have been slowly descending into a state of crisis not fully realized by the public. Fixed costs and health care benefit costs are rising at record rates. Moreover, in the wake of the pandemic, we must serve students who come to us in need of unprecedented amounts of remedial instruction, developmental services, and mental health needs. We cannot turn our back on them, but the needs of these students require extraordinary expenditures. Our administrative offices are also faced with ever-larger numbers of federal mandates.

Yet the level of state funding per FTE has collapsed—for example, according to the State Higher Education Officers' Association, Connecticut's spending on higher education per FTE decreased 24.1 percent between 2008 and 2018. In 2001, Connecticut spent \$590 per FTE, which was 3.1 percent of total appropriations. But in 2021, we spent only \$372 per FTE, which is only 2.7 percent of total appropriations.<sup>1</sup> And Governor Lamont's budget, which severely underfunds higher education right at the time when our budget surplus should mean that we have an opportunity to fund it adequately, only makes things worse.

That is why I have come to realize that a more fundamental structural change in how the State of Connecticut thinks about revenue is necessary. CSU/AAUP belongs to Recovery for All – a statewide coalition fighting for a better future for Connecticut, bringing together more than 60 community, faith, and labor organizations.

And that is why **I am testifying in support of House Bill 5673: An Act Concerning the Reformation of Certain Taxes and Tax Equity**. Connecticut is among the wealthiest states in the nation, but we have among the worst problems with income inequality in the nation. To begin solving this terrible wealth gap takes courage. We must invest in affordable public higher

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<sup>1</sup> "Shef: FY 2018," *State Higher Education Project*, Accessed February 26, 2023, [https://sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SHEEO\\_SHEF\\_FY18\\_Report.pdf](https://sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SHEEO_SHEF_FY18_Report.pdf); "State Profile: Connecticut," *State Higher Education Finance*, Accessed February 26, 2023, <https://shef.sheeo.org/state-profile/connecticut/>

education for working people. Instead, unfortunately, we have a state in which many of our citizens struggle to raise families, even while a handful of wealthy corporations and wealthy residents are getting even wealthier. The scale of this crisis demands a bold response. People are suffering, and our state has both the responsibility and the resources to enact policies that provide for all Connecticut's families.

Here at WCSU, we serve students that frequently come from lower income families, that are often the first generation in their family to attend college, that frequently come from minority communities. It genuinely breaks my heart to see these students risk getting inferior education and to be subject to ever-increasing tuition rates because of the inability of our state to commit to the level of funding necessary to maintain these universities. This fall, WCSU's administration attempted to close several key majors, including Sociology, Political Science, Meteorology, and Economics as a cost-saving measure. We are already cutting these universities to the bone. And this is exacerbating the shocking level of income inequality and inequality of opportunity in this state, as those students with the funds to go to more expensive private universities get a full education, while in the face of budget cuts, they will be offered less and less at our state universities. When I got to this campus twenty years ago, we could offer students a wide variety of hands-on research experiences, trips with faculty abroad, and important co-curricular student activities. Now these have withered away, and we are asking students to pay more to get less.

Staggering income inequality is Connecticut's most glaring and intractable problem. Solving it will take courage. We cannot solve it by thinking about the welfare of our bondholders first. We must think about the many working people in Connecticut who are still struggling. I urge you to support House Bill 5673.

Sincerely,



Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox  
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Co-Chair, Department of History and World Perspectives  
Western Connecticut State University  
CSU-AAUP Council Member